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For immediate release...

Wildfire smoke brings record poor air quality to Oregon, new data shows

LANE COUNTY — Oregon is experiencing record poor air quality from wildfire smoke across the state, according to analysis by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA).

Oregon air reached “unhealthy” or “hazardous” levels in all parts of the state last week on the Air Quality Index (AQI)—which categorizes how clean the air is and lists associated health risks. Dense smoke is expected to remain throughout most of Oregon until at least Thursday. DEQ and LRAPA compared recent and historical Air Quality Index information for Portland, Eugene, Bend, Medford and Klamath Falls. The AQI ranks air quality on a progressive five-step scale: good, moderate, unhealthy, very unhealthy or hazardous.

Preliminary analysis shows:

- Record highs: All five cities exceeded previous daily records for poor air quality during wildfire season. Southern Oregon has previously seen extended periods of unhealthy and very unhealthy air quality, but Medford and Klamath Falls have also set records this year. All previous records were set in September 2017.
- Hazardous days: Other than Medford, no city has previously experienced a hazardous air quality day since DEQ began monitoring. Medford had one day of hazardous air quality in both 2017 and 1987. Last week, Eugene had five hazardous days, Bend and Medford had three, Portland had two, and Klamath Falls had one.
- Very unhealthy days: While Eugene, Bend, Medford and Klamath Falls have experienced very unhealthy days in previous years, Portland has never had a very unhealthy day. Last week, Portland had two very unhealthy days.

Previous and new daily AQI records (through Sunday, Sept. 13)

- Portland’s previous record AQI was 157 (unhealthy) in 2017. Portland’s new record is 477 (hazardous) set Sunday, Sept. 13.
- Eugene’s previous record AQI was 291 (very unhealthy) in 2017. Eugene’s new record is 457 (hazardous) set Sunday, Sept. 13.

- Bend's previous record AQI was 231 (very unhealthy) in 2017. Bend's new record is over 500 (beyond the AQI scale) set Saturday, Sept. 12.
- Medford's previous record AQI was 319 (hazardous). Medford's new record is 325 (hazardous) set Saturday, Sept. 12.
- Klamath Fall's previous record AQI was 254 (very unhealthy). Klamath Fall's new record is 331 (hazardous) set Saturday, Sept. 12.

DEQ's color-coded Air Quality Index provides current air quality conditions and ranks air quality on a scale of 0-500. Green (0-50) is good. Yellow (51-100) is moderate. Orange (101 to 150) is unhealthy for sensitive groups such as children, seniors, pregnant women and those with respiratory conditions. Red (151 to 200) is unhealthy for everyone. Purple (201 to 300) is very unhealthy for everyone. Maroon (301 to 500) is hazardous for everyone. Over 500 is off the AQI scale. People should follow recommendations for hazardous conditions.

Get the latest air quality info on the Oregon Smoke Information Blog or by downloading the free OregonAir smartphone app.

Note about data: Data for 2020 is preliminary and has not yet been validated according to DEQ's quality assurance procedures. Historical data focuses on wildfire smoke, and excludes data from wintertime, field burning days and the Fourth of July (because of fireworks).

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